
*** TX REPORT ***

"FINEST"

TRANSMISSION OK

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NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION
SAFETY BOARD
Washington, D.C. 20594

Office of Marine Safety

FAX #: 202-314-6454



TO: Mr. John Koenig
President, NYFFS, Inc.

FROM: Leon Katcharian
Report Writer

PHONE: 732-291-2210
FAX NUMBER: 732-291-6076

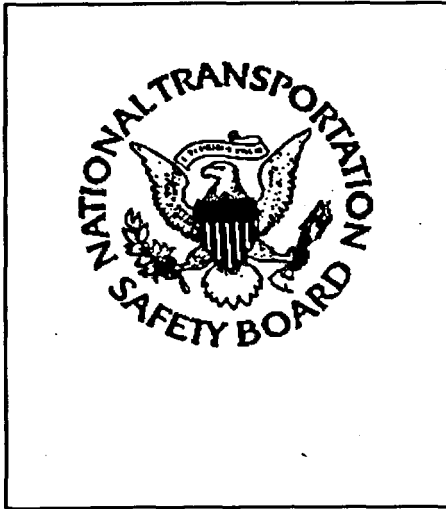
PHONE: (202) 314-6458
DATE: July 25, 2001
TIME: 4:10 PM

COMMENTS: Thank you for the information provided in your letter and Fax sent July 23, 2001.

The letter to the USCG, noted in fax item 1, was not enclosed. Request a copy of the letter to the Coast Guard.

If you have an approximate timetable/schedule when the items listed are expected to be initiated or completed, please provide this information.

**NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION
SAFETY BOARD
Washington, D.C. 20594**



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If you have an approximate timetable/schedule when the items listed are expected to be initiated or completed, please provide this information.

Sincerely,


Leon Katcharian

We are transmitting one page, including this cover page. If you do not receive these pages, please telephone 202-314-6458 or 314-6450.

12 Shrewsbury Ave • Highlands, NJ 07732
732-291-2210 ☎ FAX 732-291-6076



Fax

To: I.Z. Katcharian From: John Koenig
Fax: 202-314-6454 Pages: 2
Phone: 202-314-6458 Date: July 23rd 2001
Re: _____ CC: _____

☐ Urgent ☐ For Review ☐ Please Comment ☐ Please Reply

◆ MESSAGE



July 23, 2001

I.Z. Katcharian OMS
National Transportation Safety Board
Washington, D.C. 20594

Via Fax: 314-6454

Dear Mr. Katcharian:

In response to your letter of July 6th 2001, I will list the steps we have taken.

1. Request range lights installed or reinstalled by U.S.C.G (See Encl. letter)
2. Review navigational tools and standard practices during winter operation. (See Encl.)
 - a. Test current knowledge level.
 - b. Issue corrected procedures.
 - c. Test for procedure retainment.
3. Move small launch to S.H.B.M., 26' launch with 2' draft.
4. Oxygen onboard both vessels.
5. Additional training for masters, mates, mechanics and deckhands on groundings of vessels with water jets, sandy substrate/other conditions. Checking voids, taking soundings, crowd control.
6. Drug kits onboard & emergency (off hours telephone numbers) and procedures for drug and alcohol testing.
7. All personnel running as Master or Mate to have radar endorsements.
8. Install larger magnetic steering compass, Post standard compass courses.
9. Program GPS: Pier 11 to Highlands, and critical waypoints.
10. Review all piloting and bridge communication procedure.

Please let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Koenig", written over a horizontal line.

John Koenig



National Transportation Safety Board
Washington, D.C. 20594

July 6, 2001

Mr. John Koenig, President
New York Fast Ferry Services, Inc.
52 Shrewsbury Avenue
Highlands, New Jersey 07732

Dear Mr. Koenig:

Ref: Grounding of the Fast Ferry *Finest* near the Shrewsbury Channel on January 4, 2001
(DCA01MM015)

This letter is a follow up to Ted White's telephone call on Tuesday, July 3, 2001. I am drafting the report of the referenced accident and need the following information to complete the report process:

- a. Has your company developed a navigation plan for your vessel masters for navigating in ice or other conditions, especially in the Sandy Hook Bay area? If so, please provide a copy of your guidance; and,
- b. Has your company made any moves, independently or with the Coast Guard, to establish a "range" for the Shrewsbury Channel at the Sandy Hook Bay Marina? If so, what progress have you made.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 202-314-6458, by facsimile at 314-6454, or e-mail: katchal@ntsb.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "L. Katcharian", is written over a circular stamp.

Leon Z. Katcharian
Report Writer



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

July 18, 2001

Mr. John Koenig, President
New York Fast Ferry Services, Inc.
52 Shrewsbury Avenue
Highlands, New Jersey 07732

Ref: Grounding of the Fast Ferry *Finest* Near the Shrewsbury River Channel, Sandy Hook,
New Jersey, January 4, 2001 (our file DCA01MM015)

Dear Mr. Koenig:

Enclosed are draft factual reports developed for the referenced accident.

The drafts are preliminary, pending the review by your company. Accordingly, please keep it confidential. You may make a copy for your records, but we request that you return the original to us with your comments, if any. In the drafts, we have not attempted to restate all of the factual material gathered in this investigation. Also, it is still possible that additional information from factual documents, may be included in our final report, even though such information does not appear in the draft factual report at this time.

This review by mail by your company will suffice as the technical review meeting of the review the draft factual reports.

Although your comments are not required, the Safety Board believes that your comments are important, both to the Board and to your organization, and we urge you to comment on the reports as appropriate. It would be appreciated if you would carefully review these reports to ensure that the factual data is correct and complete. If you identify any errors or omissions please bring them to our attention as soon as possible. Your comments on the draft reports are still desired. You are also requested to provide your comments in writing by August 6, 2001. If you desire you may simply annotate your comments and corrections on the enclosed drafts.

If you have any questions concerning the Board's procedures or the draft factual reports, please contact me at 202-314-6458 or Ted White at 202-314-6456 or by facsimile at 202-314-6454.

Sincerely,

Leon Z. Katcharian
Report Writer

Enclosures

*Brief Factual
less PC
Summary Factual*

*No reply on
received. (P)* *draft reports*

Marine Accident Brief

Accident No.: DCA01MM015

Vessel: U.S. Passenger Ferry *FINEST*, O.N. 1044082, 93 gross tons, overall length 127 feet, beam 32.8 feet, draft 6 feet, catamaran (aluminum) hull, built in 1996; inspected

Accident Type: Grounding

Location: Sandy Hook Bay, New Jersey near the Shrewsbury River Entrance Buoy 2 (latitude: 40°25.26'N and longitude 74°00.016'W)

Date: January 4, 2001

Time: 1930 (local)

Owner: Fast Ferry I Corporation, Highlands, New Jersey

Operator: New York Fast Ferry Services, Inc., Highlands, New Jersey

Property Damage: None

Injuries: None

Complement: 6 Crewmembers
1 Company Employee
258 Passengers

Synopsis

At 1930 on January 4, 2001, while en route from Manhattan, New York City to Highlands, New Jersey, with 265 passengers and crew on board, the high-speed ferry *Finest* ran aground outside the channel to the Shrewsbury River, Sandy Hook Bay. After the tide changed, the *Finest* refloated at 0007 on January 5, moored to its dock at 0026 and discharged its passengers. There were no injuries to anyone on board and no damage to the vessel.

Background

The *Finest* was certificated to carry a maximum of 354 passengers and crew. Required manning consists of a master, 1 licensed mate, and 2 or 3 deckhands (depending on passenger load). At the time of the grounding there was a master, senior deckhand, 4 other deckhands, and one company employee on board. The Master held a license for 100 gross tons near coastal waters issued by the Coast Guard. The senior deckhand did not have a license but he was qualified by the Master to act as a mate, as allowed by the vessel's certificate of inspection. Two deckhands, also serving as engineers, held master's licenses for 50 and 100 gross tons, respectively. The other two deckhands did not have licenses.

The *Finest* was equipped with 2 VHF radios, 2 radars, chart plotter (electronic charting system), GPS/Loran, autopilot, and a gyrocompass.

The *Finest* normally makes 1-2 morning trips from the Sandy Hook Bay Marina at the Highlands, New Jersey, to the East River in New York City with stops at Pier 11 (Wall Street) in lower Manhattan and East 34th Street in Mid-Town Manhattan and 1-2 evening trips from Manhattan to New Jersey. The trips are about 19 to 22 miles long and take about 40 and 55 minutes, respectively (see figure 1A). The *Finest* operates between 34 and 38 knots during the open water parts of the trip.

The Accident

At 1805 on January 4, 2001, the *Finest* departed the East 34th Street Terminal, Manhattan, New York City, after loading 66 passengers. It proceeded down the East River to Pier 11 (Wall Street), Manhattan. After loading an additional 192 passengers, the *Finest* departed at 1825, for

1 the Sandy Hook Bay Marina (SHBM), Highlands, New Jersey. The master turned over the conn
2 (steering and speed control) to the mate (the senior deckhand) after departing the pier.

3
4 Weather was clear with 8 to 15 miles visibility; winds were 12 to 15 knots from the west
5 to northwest, seas calm in ice, and air temperature 28°F. It is noted that at this time of the year
6 portions of the ferry route are sometimes covered with ice.

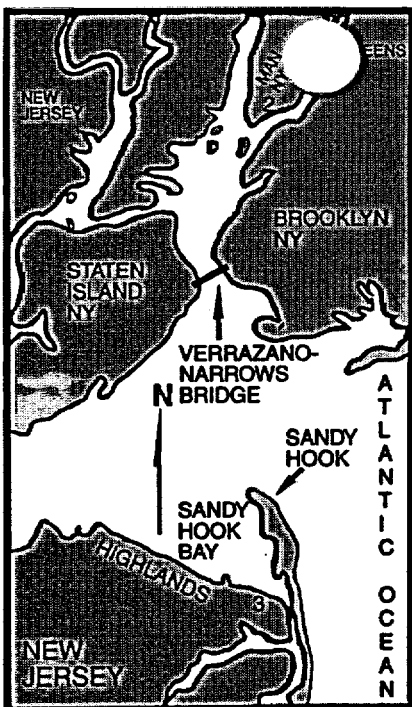
7
8 The main propulsion cooling systems had been modified to allow operation in the ice.
9 However, the cooling water for the two electrical generators had not been modified and
10 frequently became clogged when operating in ice. It is a routine practice for vessel personnel to
11 secure the generators when in an ice field. There is adequate emergency lighting from the 24-volt
12 D.C. system. However, the public address (PA) system and the heating/ventilation and cooling
13 (HVAC) system operate on 120-volt power supplied by either one of the two generators and are
14 not operating when the vessel transits the ice field, which, generally lasts for only about 10
15 minutes. The PA system in both passenger cabins is operated from the steering station on the
16 bridge. It was loud and clear during use observed by investigating personnel. Communications
17 between all crew is via handheld radios on the FM business spectrum and when the PA is
18 inoperative, the crew via radio communications from the pilothouse advises the passengers of the
19 situation.

20
21 At 1846, when the *Finest* was between the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge and Sandy Hook, a
22 passenger went to the pilothouse complaining of hives and swelling which was beginning to
23 affect his breathing. At 1916, the mate on watch contacted Coast Guard Station Sandy Hook by

1 VHF-FM radio Channel 16 and asked that they arrange for medical assistance at the SHBM. The
2 medical assistance and police officers from the Highlands, New Jersey Police Department arrived
3 at the SHBM at 1920 to await the arrival of the *Finest*.
4

5 As the *Finest* passed Buoy 17 in the Sandy Hook Channel, about ½ mile west of the
6 northern end of Sandy Hook, ice was observed inside of Sandy Hook and covered the normal
7 track the vessel would take to the Shrewsbury Channel and the SHBM (about 3 ½ and 4 miles,
8 respectively; see figure 1B). The mate altered course to parallel, on a southerly course, the
9 western edge of the ice field. The master took over the conn about 2 ½ miles later, continuing
10 southbound with the *Finest* still outside of the ice. About ½ mile later, with the *Finest* about 7/10
11 mile from the southern shore, the master turned the vessel to port, in an easterly direction and
12 toward the ice field. The vessel's engines were slowed as the *Finest* entered the ice. The
13 electrical generators could not pump cooling water to its system in the ice and was secured to
14 prevent overheating damage. Without the generators operating, the PA system and the HVAC
15 system were inoperative.
16

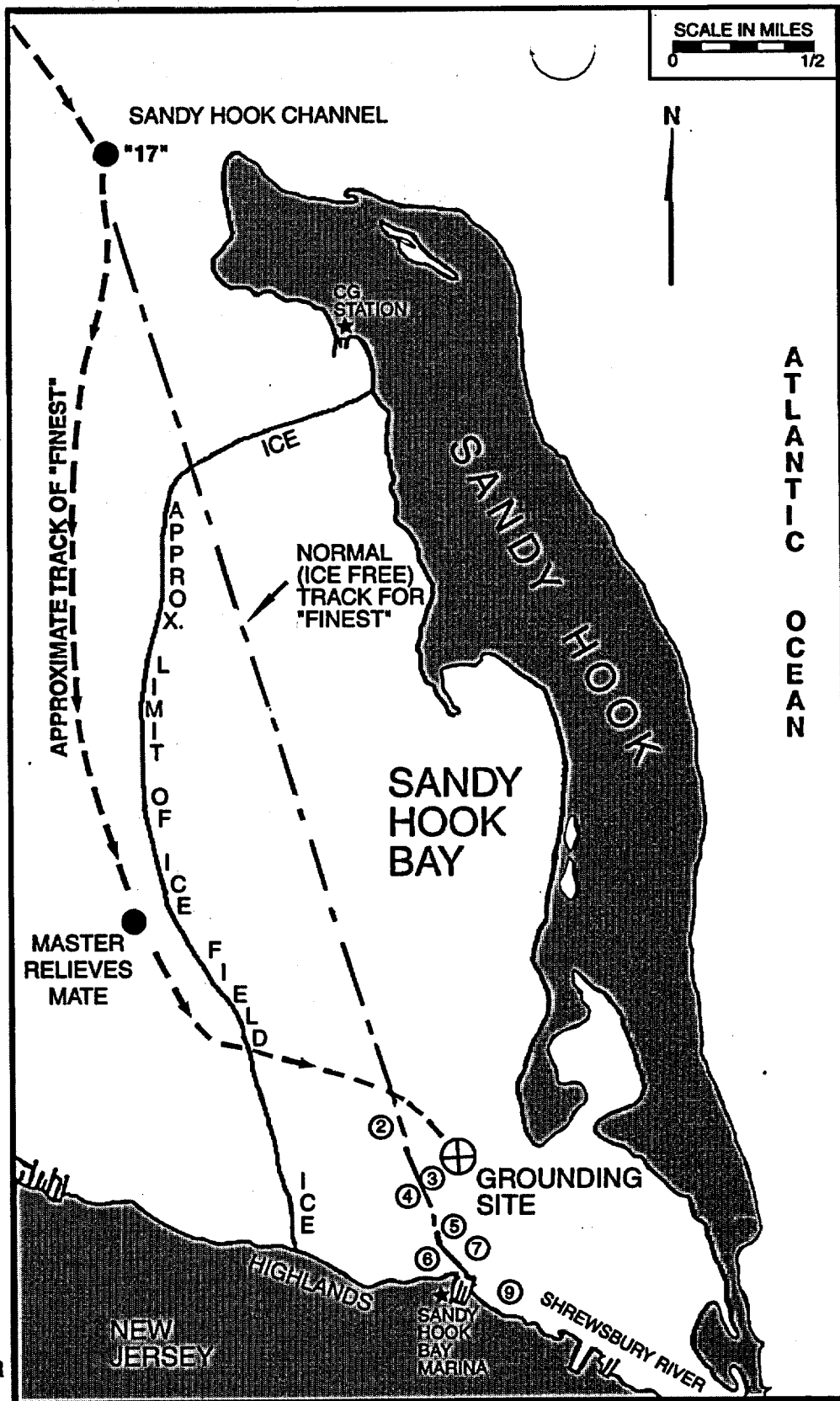
17 The buoys of the Shrewsbury Channel were not seen. The mate was sent outside on the
18 starboard bridge wing, but still could not see the buoys. Also, the master could not see the buoys
19 on the radar screen. The buoys had been forced under the ice by the outgoing (ebb) tide, which is
20 not an uncommon situation with ice present in the bay. There was no range¹ for the Shrewsbury
21 Channel and the master did not use the chart plotter or use the radar to take ranges or bearings for



LEGEND

1. E 34th STREET TERMINAL, MANHATTAN
2. PIER 11 (WALL STREET), MANHATTAN
3. SANDY HOOK BAY MARINA

FIGURE 1A. ROUTE



LEGEND

- ②-⑨ SHREWSBURY RIVER CHANNEL BUOYS

FIGURE 1B. ACCIDENT SITE

1 navigating the vessel, nor had the company provided any guidelines for navigating the vessel in
2 this area. However, the lights of the SHBM were visible on the starboard side. About ½ mile
3 later, the master estimated visually where he felt the entrance to the Shrewsbury Channel was
4 and turned the vessel to the right to a southerly course. The *Finest* had been operating in the ice
5 for about one mile at about 10 knots when it slowly came to a stop. The master believed that the
6 ice had stopped the vessel and at 1929, he asked the CG Station Sandy Hook for assistance to get
7 his vessel through the ice. After attempting to free the vessel with engine maneuvers, he realized
8 that the vessel had grounded and at 1939, advised the CG that his vessel was aground. The draft
9 of the *Finest* was 6 feet and the depth of the water was about 4 feet. The Master used the portable
10 radios to communicate the situation with the deckhands, and directed them to walk through the
11 two passenger cabins advising the passengers of the situation.

12
13 When it became apparent that there would be an extended delay in refloating the *Finest*,
14 the two deckhands with engineering experience conceived and implemented a means of
15 providing cooling water to the electrical generator in the port engine room. This restored full
16 electrical service to the vessel in about 1 hour, including the PA system and HVAC system.

17
18 At 1957, CG Station Sandy Hook sent their 47-foot-long motor lifeboat (MLB) to the
19 scene. They reached the area at 2015, but were unable to approach the *Finest* because of the
20 shallow water. At 2150, 4 CG helicopters (2 from CG Air Station Cape Cod and 2 from CG Air

¹ Two lights or distinctive shapes placed in line as an aid to navigation to indicate a safe course to steer. The rear light or shape is placed higher but in the same vertical plane as the front light. Because of their fixed nature and the accuracy with which a vessel can be maneuvered by keeping the lights or shapes aligned, ranges are excellent aids to navigation.

1 Station Atlantic City) were ordered to proceed to Floyd Bennett Field, Brooklyn, New York,
2 about 12 miles from the grounding site, and standby at that location.

3
4 At the time of grounding, the tide was ebbing and its level was 0.7 feet above mean lower
5 low water (MLLW)². The tide dropped to a low level of 0.2 feet at 2125. The *Finest* was
6 refloated at 0007 on January 5, when the flood tide reached 1.8 feet above MLLW. The vessel
7 proceeded under its own power arriving at the SHBM berth at 0026. There was no hull damage
8 to the *Finest* and no pollution. At 0035, the CG MLB was ordered to return to its Station and the
9 4 CG helicopters were released to return to their respective air stations at 0040.

10
11 When the grounding prevented the *Finest* from arriving at their dock, New York Fast
12 Ferry company personnel and a police officer from the Highland, New Jersey Police Department
13 got underway on the tug *Marcie* that was moored at the SHBM, about ½ mile from the grounding
14 site. However, due to the shallow water, the *Marcie* was unable to reach the *Finest* and grounded
15 about 100 feet from the *Finest*. New York City Police Aviation Unit responded to the Highlands
16 Police Department request for evacuation of the ill passenger. They dispatched a hoist-equipped
17 helicopter and a crewman was lowered to the rooftop of the *Finest* with a stretcher. The
18 passenger was hoisted from the *Finest* and taken to a local hospital where he was treated for an
19 allergic reaction and released.

20

² MLLW is the chart datum (reference point) for charted depths used in this area of the coast and is the average of the lower of two daily low tides. At most states of the tide, the mariner has at least the water depth as marked on the navigation charts. Tide tables use the same reference as the navigation charts.

Post Accident Drug and Alcohol Testing

At 0128 on January 5, a Coast Guard boarding team from Coast Guard Station Sandy Hook arrived at the SHBM to conduct a post-accident test for alcohol of the operator. The alcohol (breathalyzer) test was administered to the master at 0130 on January 5, approximately 6 hours after the grounding. The result was negative for alcohol. The New York Fast Ferry Company then took the master and the 5 crewmembers to a local hospital for screening for illicit drugs. Those results were also negative.